

ORIGINS OF EAST EUROPEAN JEWRY

Myth and Fact

BERNARD D. WEINRYB

BACK in 1947, when the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine decided on partition, one member of that Committee, Sir Abdur Rahman of India, in opposing a Jewish state in Palestine, asserted that "whatever claim the Jews may have" to the land of their ancestors, "this claim cannot be made by those who were subsequently converted to Judaism." And he went on to say: "Khazars of Eastern Europe, Turco-Finn by race, were converted to Judaism; can their descendants possibly claim any rights simply because the ancestors of their co-religionists had once settled in Palestine?"

Later, in October 1947, when the issue of partition was brought before the UN Ad Hoc Committee on the Palestine Question, Faris el Khouri, delegate of Syria, advanced a similar argument: "Only a small fraction of them [the Jews] could lay claim to being children of Israel or even Semites Ninety per cent of the Jews of Eastern Europe were descendants of Slavs, Germans, Franks, and Khazars." The speaker invoked the authority of the *Jewish Encyclopedia* for his statement. And that work partly bears him out. For Jewish scholarship generally, and Jewish historiography in particular, have to a considerable extent accepted the notion that East European Jewry had its origin among the Khazars—sometimes combining this highly dubious supposition with other hypotheses or myths.

BERNARD D. WEINRYB, the historian and economist, teaches economics at Dropsie College and also at Columbia University. Born in Poland, he came to this country in 1939. Professor Weinryb is the author of works in German and Hebrew as well as English. He was co-author with the late Peter Meyer of *Jews in the Soviet Satellites* (1953).

The currency of myths and unfounded hypotheses about the beginnings of East European Jewry has been facilitated by the lack of historical clarity about the origins of the Russian and Polish states, as well as of their peoples. But if little is known generally about either Russia or Poland in the early centuries of the present millennium, still less is known about the first Jews who lived in their territories. And as often happens when historians lack material on which to base their narratives, resort is had to tales and legends or to "circumstantial evidence," and this makes it all the more difficult to disentangle truth from fable, fact from fancy.

SINCE the beginning of the 19th century, or even earlier, Jewish and Gentile historians alike have been baffled by the absence of documentary evidence bearing on the origins of the millions of Jews who were concentrated in Eastern Europe, and, until the Second World War, comprised a majority of world Jewry. Where did they come from? How did they get to Eastern Europe, and when? History had little to reply to these questions. And to make matters even more difficult, there was the fact that East European Jews did not for the most part conform in physical appearance to the Mediterranean "Jewish" type; some of them were, and are, quite fair. Nor was their language—Yiddish—or spiritual culture any more Mediterranean in character: both were unmistakably of Ashkenazi, German-Jewish, provenance.

The attitude of Jewish historians themselves only added further complications to the question. They felt "compelled," in depicting the fate of a minority group still struggling for civil rights, to appeal to "his-

torical facts" for support of its claims. Since it was thought that the Jewish claim to equal rights could best be helped by showing how ancient was the presence of Jews in the Slavic lands, the aim became to push their arrival there ever further back in time. Hence Jewish writers eagerly greeted the idea that it antedated even the origins of the Polish and Russian states.

The historical facts seemed to lend some encouragement to this notion, for after the temporary unification of each country in the 10th century, both Poland and Russia had disintegrated into two clusters of principalities; it had taken several more centuries before either country again achieved a unified state. It seemed entirely possible to date the beginnings of the Jewish settlement of Eastern Europe within those centuries or earlier. But still, where could those first Jewish settlers have come from?

A number of hypotheses were evolved, and for want of sufficient controverting evidence lingered on in scholarly circles longer than they should. One held that the East European Jews had originated, at least in part, from among Greek and Byzantine Jews; the existence of some Jews along the northern shores of the Black Sea in ancient and early medieval times was evidenced by inscriptions and other sources. Another hypothesis made the first Jews in Eastern Europe the descendants of Jewish emigrants from Babylonia and Persia in the 7th and 9th centuries C.E. A third hypothesis pushed the beginnings of the Jews in Southeastern Europe back to the exile of the Ten Tribes, or to the first destruction of the Temple (8th and 6th centuries B.C.E.). A fourth hypothesis maintained that they first entered Eastern Europe about a thousand years ago, and came principally from the West. A compromise held that the Jews arrived in Poland, or Eastern Europe in general, from both the East or Southeast and the West.

But the most spectacular hypothesis claimed that the foundation of Eastern European Jewry was owed principally to the Khazars.

THE Khazars were a conglomerate of what appear to have been semi-nomadic Turkish tribes from Central Asia. From the 6th century C.E. or earlier, they lived in the territory between the Northern Caucasus and the lower Volga River in the southeastern part of European Russia. Spreading as far west as Kiev and conquering as they went, they succeeded in founding a strong state in the 7th century that served as a partial barrier against the northward advance of the Arabs, then at the crest of their expansion. Shortly before the middle of the 8th century, a part of the Khazars, led by their king and his entourage, embraced Judaism; the rest, however, remained idolators or were converted eventually to Mohammedanism or Christianity.

The multi-ethnic and multi-lingual Khazar empire flourished for about two centuries, subjugating other tribes in its region and forcing some of its Russian neighbors to pay it tribute or at least tolls for the use of the commercial routes it controlled. In 965 (according to the *Russian Chronicle*) or thereabouts, the Kievan Russians rose up and overcame the Khazars, destroying their capital and other cities. Though there is evidence that the Khazars stayed on in European Russia almost up to the time of the Mongol invasion in the 13th century, it seems that they never regained their old power—or so one judges from the obscurity that surrounds the remainder of their history. By the 11th and 12th centuries they were being hard pressed, in the region where they lived, by the Cumans, another tribe of Ugro-Finnish or Turkish extraction.

The very lack of information about the Khazars—we do not possess one word that comes indisputably from them—combined with certain accounts by Arab writers, many of whom were reporting events that happened long before their own time, prepared the ground for all sorts of myths. Adding to rather than detracting from the obscurity are documents containing what is alleged to be an exchange of letters in the 10th century between Hasdai ibn Shapruth, a Hispanic Jewish dignitary, and one of the

Khazars' Jewish kings, Joseph. Opinion about these letters ranges from the view that they are genuine to finding them complete forgeries; a well-founded surmise is that they are apocryphal or purely literary productions of the 10th century or later. Still other legends were engendered by documents forged in the 19th century by a Russian Karaite named Abraham Firkovich (1785-1874).

In the 1830's and 1840's Firkovich traveled through the Crimea and the Caucasus, searching in cemeteries and synagogues for material on the Karaites, and he also went to Palestine and Egypt where he collected Hebrew manuscripts. All this was done with the aim of convincing the Czar's government that the Karaites had come to Russia before the time of Jesus and so could not have had a share in the responsibility for his crucifixion, and therefore should, unlike other Jews, receive civic rights. Firkovich did in fact persuade the Russian government, but in doing so left a long trail of forgeries behind him. He falsified the epitaphs on many gravestones and injected spurious passages into many old manuscripts in order to prove that Jews with Tartaric names had lived in the Crimea in the 1st century B.C.E.; that other Jews had come there from Persia; and that it was the Karaites who had converted the Khazars and thus founded the first Jewry in Russia. Firkovich also considerably extended the boundaries and inflated the importance of the Khazars' empire. A little later he committed another series of forgeries when he "fixed" some of the manuscripts so that the library in St. Petersburg would buy them.

His "discoveries" led to a great controversy, with historians like Isaac Marcus Jost, Heinrich Graetz, and others accepting them as genuine, but many more rejecting them, including Moses Steinschneider, the German scholar Hermann Strack, and the Russian Jewish scholar A. Harkavy. Later, even such a staunch defender of Firkovich as Professor D. A. Chwolson (1819-1911), who was instrumental in getting the Czarist government to buy the Firkovich collection

for the library in St. Petersburg, had to admit that the documents were full of falsifications. "Studying the gravestones and their inscriptions on the spot and comparing, over a period of many years, the copies . . . [made by Firkovich] of these inscriptions, I came to the conclusion," writes Chwolson in the introduction to an edition of some of these materials, "that Firkovich actually changed many dates and in this way transferred many inscriptions from the XVI and XVIII centuries to the X and XI. Everything which went through the hands of Firkovich is suspect."

Nonetheless, the theory that the Khazars were the true progenitors of East European Jewry did find its way into respectable historiography. Even though the speculation that the Jews of Eastern Europe were descended from the Khazars was used for anti-Jewish purposes—Ernest Renan, for instance, saw it as proof that Jews did not represent a unified racial stock (and were therefore inferior)—some Jewish scholars found the thesis useful for the purposes of apologetics.

Max Gumpłowicz (1864-1897), held that the Khazars and their followers had for a time ruled Poland and even parts of Bohemia; and that they had been the only ones who carried on commerce in early Poland. And like Firkovich, Gumpłowicz saw in them the progenitors of Polish Jewry:

The Khazar empire stretched from the river Volga to the Vistula. . . . In the era of the flourishing of the Khazars, many of their followers among the Slavic, Alan, and Ugro-Finnish peoples . . . embraced Judaism. When at the end of the 10th century the Khazar empire fell . . . the Jewish religion was to a great degree preserved . . . its [the empire's] followers, who had felt the weight of the Khazar sword, began to value the only heritage of the heroic Khazars, "the old religion," more than ever, regarding all the misfortunes which had befallen the Khazars as punishment for failure to fulfill God's commandments and the teachings of Moses.

Isaac Schipper (1884-1943) combined the Khazar hypothesis with another one which held that many of the Jews of the earlier

Middle Ages had been engaged in agriculture. The main evidence Schipper advanced for his theory was a few place names supposedly indicating that Khazars and Jews had been settled in villages of their own, and the mention of three or four Jews in connection with land ownership or farming in Western Poland (Silesia) at the beginning of the 13th century.

A later book, *Khazaria*, by A. Pollack (it is written in Hebrew), follows the Firkovich-Gumplowicz-Schipper theory in part, but contends that the Khazars were in the main a commercial people, and they, or their descendants, were the founders of the proverbial East European *shtetl*. Not only does Pollack misread the history of the beginnings of the cities and towns of Eastern Europe; he sees the Yiddish of the East European Jews as being derived from the language of the Goths who in the early Middle Ages inhabited parts of Southern Russia, and the traditional Jewish attire of fur hat (*shtreiml*), skullcap, long black coat (*kaftan*), etc., etc., as derived from the "original Khazar-Kozak-Jewish" way of dressing.

The Khazar theory—not necessarily in the extreme form given it by Pollack, and sometimes in conjunction with hypotheses placing the origin of East European (or Polish) Jewry in the Greek-Byzantine period—was, as I have said, generally adopted in Jewish historiography. Although it had no real basis in historical fact and verged on myth, only a few historians, such as Simon Dubnow and Emanuel Ringelblum (who perished in the Warsaw ghetto) rejected it for Polish Jewry. And even they did not deny its possible validity in accounting for the earliest Jewish settlements in Russia. A third Polish Jewish historian, Meir Balaban (1877-1942), at first was a protagonist of the Khazar theory, but later refuted it.

ACTUALLY, a great many historical facts were available to disprove not only the Khazar hypothesis, but also most of the other theories holding that the Jewish colonizers of Eastern Europe came from the East or Southeast, and contending further that

at a quite early date Jews settled in the region in great numbers rather than as scattered individuals.

According to the evidence, the Jewish settlement in Eastern Europe appears, on the contrary, to have been quite insignificant, or almost non-existent, even as late as the second half of the 12th century. Neither of the two Jewish travelers of that period who have left accounts of their journeys—Benjamin of Tudela, who traveled between 1165 and 1173, and Petachya of Regensburg, who was on the move between 1175 and 1190—says anything about Jewish communities in Eastern Europe. Benjamin, whose itinerary* is a source of information about Jewish communities all over the world in his day, does not mention the presence of Jews anywhere at all east of Prague. In the last chapter of his book, writing about Germany and her Jewish communities, he summarizes: "... and in these cities many Jews are learned and rich." The next paragraph reads: "... and after that [after Germany] there is Bohemia and the city called Prague, which is the beginning of the land Slavonia, which the Jews who live there [in Prague] call Kanaan† because the people who live there sell their sons and daughters as slaves to all nations; these are the people of Russia and this is a large state from Prague to the city of Kiev." There follows a description of the winter cold in Russia, but no mention of Jews in that country, and then a description of France and of the Jewish way of life there.

About a decade after Benjamin, Petachya of Regensburg traveled "from Prague in Bohemia to Poland, from Poland to Kiev in Russia, and from Russia . . . to Kadar

**Massaoth Rabbi Benjamin*—Travels of Rabbi Benjamin; critical edition by M. N. Adler, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*, Oxford, 1907.

†In the Bible, Canaan was cursed by his grandfather Noah: "A servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren" (Gen. 10:25). Jews in the Middle Ages applied the word "Kanaan" to the Slavs (and sometimes also to Germans) in the same way that Latin documents from the 9th century on used the word "*sclave*" (whence the English "slave") to mean both the Slavonic people and people reduced to a condition of servitude.

[Crimea] and . . . Khazaria."* Of Jews in this whole region he only says: "and in the land Kadar there are no [Rabbanite] Jews, only Karaites"; and he goes on to relate how these Karaite Jews attributed their ignorance of non-Karaite Jewish teachings to the fact that there was no one from whom they could learn about them. The only explanation for the silence of both Benjamin and Petachya about Jewish settlements in Eastern Europe outside Bohemia is either that no such settlements then existed, or that they were so few and unimportant that the travelers simply had not heard of them. When we discount Firkovich's falsifications and the vague assumptions connected with it (Pollack, for instance, bases part of his reasoning on Firkovich's material), we are left with hardly anything to support the Khazar theory of the origin of East European Jewry. Place names found between the 13th and 15th centuries in Russia and Poland, such as Kozar (Khazar), Zidowo (Jews-ville), and the like, are no proof in themselves that Khazars or Jews lived in these places, or that these had any connection with Jews.†

The language and cultural heritage of the East European Jews both point clearly to a West European origin. Schipper himself, the protagonist of the Khazar theories, could turn up very few recorded names of medieval East European Jews that it was possible to connect with the East: among 163 such names, he found one that might have been of Turkish origin (provided it was not simply an error on the part of the non-Jewish official who drew up the document) and five of Greek origin, such as Alexander and Kalonymos, which were also found among Jews in Germany (and Spain) in the Middle Ages. But for the most part the names are of German and Slavic provenance, with a few of Romance origin. The tongue spoken

by the bulk of East European Jewry was from the first the same as that of the Jews in the German lands. Only the small Karaite group and the few mountain Jews of the Crimea and the Caucasus used a different language—the first, a Tartaric dialect; the second, a Persian one.

If external physical features or blood type can be relied upon as indications of origin, then the Karaite Jews, like the mountain Jews of the Crimea and the Caucasus, belong to the Eastern type of Jew and may indeed, as some believe, be descended from the Khazars or from the Jews of Middle Eastern extraction who mixed with the Khazars. An investigation made in the 1920's showed that Crimean Jews, whether Karaite or Rabbinic, were quite different in blood type from Ashkenazic or Sephardic Jews, and resemble such Turkic tribes as the Kirghizes and Uzbeks.

In religious tradition the East European Jews seem to have been early followers of the Western tradition of German-French Jewry. At any rate, evidence has been preserved in Rabbinic sources which shows that some Jews living in Slav countries in the first half of the 13th century sought advice in religious matters from rabbinical authorities in the West. There are also certain other indications of contact between Jews of the Slavic East and the rabbinical authorities of French-German Jewry.

IT is a known fact that before 1764, when certain parts of Russia were opened to Jews—or, more properly, before the Russian annexations of Polish territory, in 1772, 1793, and 1795—there seem to have been practically no Jews within the confines of the Russian empire. Whatever truth or legend may say about the settlement of Jews in Kiev and other parts of Russia during early medieval times, they seem all to have disappeared with the destruction of the cities during the Mongol invasion in the 1240's, or even earlier (as noted above, the two Jewish travelers of the second half of the 12th century mention no Jews in the region). The Khazars who survived in Rus-

**Sibbub Rabi Petachya* with English translation, *The Travels of Rabbi Petachya*, London, 1856.

†Historians can explain these names otherwise. (Thus *Kosa* or *Koza* happens also to be the Slavic for "sickle" and "goat" respectively.)

sia into the 13th century—and one should by no means identify all of them as Jewish—were swept away at the same time. The cities where Khazars formed part or the whole of the population were captured by the Tartars in the 1220's and 1230's and their inhabitants slaughtered.

A variety of sources converge to indicate that by the 13th century the Jewish Khazars, who constituted a minority in the Khazar empire even during its heyday, had disappeared. Arab writers from the end of the 10th century tell us again and again that the Khazars had renounced Judaism and embraced the Moslem religion. On the other hand, a Russian chronicle of the 12th century tells how the Khazars, together with the Bulgars of the Volga, embraced Christianity. A Georgian chronicle records the arrival, in 1260, of descendants of the Khazar kings in the capital of a Tartar prince; their names are no longer Jewish.

The disappearance of the Jewish Khazars seems to be likewise borne out by a Hebrew source of a century earlier. A Spanish Jewish scholar, Abraham ibn Daud, writing about 1160, indicates that by his time most of the Jewish Khazars had disappeared; he speaks about them as in the past and mentions only a few surviving remnants. The Jewish communities that followed the Rabbanite instead of the Karaite way of life, he says, spread "up to the river Itil [Volga], where the Khazars who embraced Judaism lived . . . we have seen in Toledo some of their descendants who are scholars, and they told us that the remnants [of the Khazars] are Rabbanite Jews."

For over a century after the Mongol invasion there is no sign of Jews as such in southern Russia or in those parts of Russia which were later united with Poland. In southern Poland, as well as farther north—in Lithuania—the presence of Jews is not noticed again until the 14th century, when mention is first made of rights granted to Jews in Eastern Galicia and Lithuania. But it is significant that these rights were, both in their substance and in their manner of formulation, of Western provenance or be-

trayed Western influence. In other words, they appear to have been granted to Jews who had come, in great part, from western Poland.

There is documentary evidence for the presence of Jews in the Genoese commercial colonies which existed on the Crimean coast of the Black Sea from the 13th to the 15th centuries, but they were not very numerous, apparently, and were either of Ashkenazic or Italian-Greek origin—certainly, they were not Khazars. After these so-called Kaffa colonies fell under Turco-Tartaric dominion in 1475 these Jews may either have emigrated, some going to Poland, or disappeared among the Tartaric Jews or local population.

All this would indicate that the Jews who begin, in the second half of the 18th century, to appear in the records as inhabitants of the Russian empire were in reality Polish Jews who either had immigrated there or lived in Polish territory annexed by Russia.

IN POLAND itself, there seems to be no indisputable evidence of the presence of Jews within its borders until around 1200 or a little earlier. What we have from earlier periods are legends (apparently created in later times for apologetic purposes), inferences based on a very few facts, and bits of information of doubtful provenance.

To legend belongs the story that Abraham Prochovnik, around the middle of the 9th century, was proclaimed prince of Poland. The Poles—so goes the story—could not agree as to who should succeed their prince, who had just died. They resolved to select the first man who entered the Polish capital the next morning. It happened to be Abraham Prochovnik. But he refused the office and urged the Poles to elect instead a wise man from among themselves. In Polish *Prochovnik* means "merchant" or "maker of gunpowder," which would indicate that the legend could not have arisen before the 14th century when gunpowder first became known in Europe.

It is held that Jews must have settled in Poland very early because the overland trade route from Europe to the Orient crossed

that country and some of the Jewish traders may have settled there. But the truth is that in the early Middle Ages Poland was not on the West-East trade route. Nor do even the sources invoked in this case actually mention Jewish merchants going over any such route. Two generations of Jewish historians have here relied on material that does not really contain the information supposed to be found in them.

In his *Book of the Routes of the Kingdom*, Ibn Khordadbah (c. 820-912), Controller of the Post in Persia, gives a rather hazy description of Europe and European trade routes, and mentions routes used by Jewish merchants traveling from Western Europe to the Orient. He closes his statement about sea routes with a paragraph that begins: "Sometimes, also, they take the route back of the Rumiya [meaning Constantinople] and, crossing the country of the Slavs, proceed to . . . the capital of the Khazars. . . ." Aside from the fact that nothing is said in this paragraph about Poland, Jews are not even involved; the writer has in mind Russian merchants, with whom he deals in a preceding paragraph.

Another much quoted source, an account written in Arabic by a Spanish Jew, Ibrahim ibn Yakub, who in 965 visited Prague, is equally valueless in this connection. Ibn Yakub describes Prague, remarking that "there come [to Prague], from the city of Cracow, Rus [Normans] and Slavs with wares. There also come, from the country of the Turks [meaning Hungary, which is generally called "Turkey" in the Arab sources of the time] Moslems, Jews and Turks [meaning Hungarians] with wares . . . and take slaves, tin, and fur. . . ." Ibn Yakub says nothing about Jews coming from Poland or trading through that land. Polish as well as Russian economic historians are generally of the opinion that hardly any trade routes from Central Europe passed through Poland to Russia until about the 12th century; before that time a small part of Western Poland might have been crossed by a trade route from south to north which led from the Danube and Hungary through Prague to

the Baltic, but there is no evidence for the passage of Jewish traders along this route, just as there is no evidence of a trade route through Poland to Russia before the 12th-13th centuries.

Two sources, though of doubtful reliability, do seem to indicate the presence of Jews in Poland at the end of the 11th century. One is an entry by the first Polish chronicler, Gallus (a Frenchman whose real name is unknown), which says that the Princess Judith, shortly before her death in 1085, spent considerable sums redeeming Christian slaves from their Jewish owners. Another entry, in the chronicle of Bohemia, relates that in 1098 a few Bohemian Jews who had been forcibly converted to Christianity, and later reverted to their original faith, tried to flee with their wealth to Poland and Hungary. The extant text of the Polish chronicle is founded, however, on 14th- and 15th-century manuscripts, which makes the exact content of the original chronicle uncertain. The Princess Judith story may be one of the didactic legends so common to the Middle Ages. And the mere fact related in the Bohemian chronicle that Jews fled from Bohemia toward Poland does not constitute evidence that they actually settled there.

For the second half of the 12th and the beginning of the 13th century there is more reliable evidence of the presence of Jews in Poland. Two documents concerned with ownership of two villages in Western Poland—in Silesia which, until 1335, was a Polish principality—deal with Jews. One from about 1150 (or 1200) mentions a Jew as owner or farmer of a village, and two Jews are mentioned around 1200 in another village near Breslau. If one is to believe the chronicler Vincent Kadlubek, Bishop of Cracow, heavy fines were imposed by King Mieszko III (1173-1209) upon Christians who molested Jews. From this same period, the end of the 12th and beginning of the 13th century, originate a few hundred thin silver coins inscribed on one side with Hebrew letters. Whatever the origin of these coins

may be, they do bear witness to the existence of Jews in Poland. For our purpose it is immaterial whether they are regular coins made by Jewish minters of the Polish prince, or medals of some sort, as certain Polish historians believe, or—what is more likely—coins minted by Jews under special permit. This latter was not unusual in those times in Poland, Hungary, and elsewhere.

There likewise stems from around the beginning of the 13th century an exchange of letters between a rabbi in Prague and the well-known R. Jehuda Hachassid of Regensburg (d. 1217) about the latter's objections to the custom among East European Jews of presenting the cantor with gifts of food and other things at weddings and on Holy Days. The Prague rabbi, however, points out that "in most places in Poland, Russia, and Hungary the Jews are unlearned because they are poor, and they themselves hire whoever they find will serve as a cantor, a judge, and teacher for their children, and they promise him all these [gifts]." Otherwise these East European Jews "would remain without Torah and without prayer." These letters indicate that there were small groups of Jews in Poland at the beginning of the 13th century and that they had only recently settled there, and thus had very little in the way of communal organization. This lack was remedied, apparently, some time during the second half of the 13th and the first half of the 14th century.

THE latter half of the 13th century marked the beginning of German colonization in Poland, and with the Germans came Jews. The Privilege which Prince Boleslaus of Kalish granted to the Jews of his principality in 1264 is in essence like the Magdeburg rights of self-government that were granted to German colonists by the Polish princes. Boleslaus' Privilege of 1264 is patterned after the Privileges that Frederick of Austria and King Ottocar of Bohemia granted to the Jews in their domains in 1244 and 1254 respectively, and it served in its own turn as a model for Privileges to Jews granted in the Silesian principalities of

Poland in 1295 and 1299. One may or may not grant Simon Dubnow's assumption that Boleslaus' Statute of 1264 formed a sort of "charter" for new immigrants and did not reflect the actual situation of the Jews then in Poland. Nevertheless, it reveals the beginning of a larger settlement of Jews in Poland, for it speaks not only of individual Jews, but also of Jewish cemeteries and synagogues. Moreover, the issuance itself of the Privilege can be correlated with other information about the presence of Jews in Poland in the 13th century.

Not only is there the early 13th-century correspondence between a Prague rabbi and Yehuda Hachassid of Regensburg, cited above, to evidence the presence of Jews in Eastern Europe at that time, but a Rabbi Jacob of Cracow is mentioned in a Rabbinic source of the second half of the 13th century, though it is not clear whether he was actually rabbi of that city or was only born there. One of the Hebrew tombstones found in Breslau dates from the middle of the 13th century. Non-Jewish documents tell of a "Jewish well" in Plock in 1237, and of a Jewish cemetery in Kalish in 1287. There is also evidence—with the first sources dating from the beginning, and the rest from the last quarter, of the century—of ten places in Silesia where Jews lived in the 13th century.

That there was a sizable wave of Jewish immigration to Poland in the 13th century is also indicated by the fact that in that century the Catholic Church in Eastern Europe began to try to keep Jews more strictly separated from Gentiles by forcing them to wear a special Jewish hat and live on special streets; the Church also tried to limit them in their occupations and to restrict the number of their synagogues. Resolutions to this effect were passed at the provincial synod of Breslau in February 1267, and at the synod of Ofen in 1279, in which both Polish and Hungarian churchmen participated and passed resolutions affecting Jews and Moslems alike. Similar resolutions were passed at a synod held in Leczyca in Poland in 1285. It is true that

most of these resolutions had precedents in those passed at various Church councils since the 6th century as well as in those of the synod of Vienna in 1267; but the special eagerness of the Polish clergy in the second half of the 13th century to preserve Christians from contact with Jews can be taken to show that the Jewish impact in Eastern Europe was becoming stronger at that time.

THUS all the available evidence—Jewish and Gentile sources, the Privilege of 1264, and the resolutions of the Polish ecclesiastical councils—would show that the 13th century was the time in which the real settlement of Jews in Poland started, even if some isolated individuals arrived there a little earlier. A further increase of Jewish settlement in Poland took place during the 14th century.

In Silesia, Jews are mentioned in a dozen or so places by that time. In some places such as Breslau, there is evidence from the 14th century of the first attempts of city councils to limit the commercial activities of Jews. Surviving court records tell of Jewish moneylenders and Gentile borrowers, while other records show Jews participating in local, intra-city, and intra-regional trade, and as buying and selling houses. A few Jews are also mentioned as toll farmers or minters. In 1347 and 1368 the Polish Diet tried to restrict moneylending by Jews. In 1347 we hear also of the first blood-libel accusation against Jews in Poland, and in 1367 of the first pogrom, in Poznan. In the middle of the same century, Polish Jews suffered from the persecutions coming in the wake of the Black Death. However, this epidemic did not ravage Poland to the same extent as Western Europe and its aftermath was less disastrous for Polish Jews than for those farther West.

On the other hand, the 14th was also the century of the granting and repeated confirmation of Jewish Privileges in Poland by Casimir the Great. These formal acts took place in 1334 and 1364, and similar acts are recorded for 1356 and 1367 in a number of cities in eastern Poland that were in-

corporated in the Polish state. And a Privilege to the Jews of Lvov was confirmed by the new Polish king in 1387. There were also grants of privileges to Jews in three cities in Lithuania. These Privileges, along with other documents, give evidence of the existence of Jewish communities with Jewish judges; in some places a Jewish "bishop"—or head of the community—is mentioned. In Silesia, which after 1335 became part of Bohemia, Jewish community boards are mentioned.

If only two or three Jewish communities are known to have existed in non-Silesian Poland in the 13th century, by the next century there were ten, with three more in Lithuania. The number of Jews in Poland in the 14th century is likely not to have amounted to more than a few thousand among a total population of about three-quarters of a million, but this was enough to form the real nucleus of the subsequent great East European Jewry, which was augmented over the following centuries by further immigration, mainly from Germany.

IT WILL probably never be easy to say definitely where the thousands of Jews who founded Polish or East European Jewry in the course of the 13th and 14th centuries came from. Documentary information, Jewish or Gentile, on Jews during that time is extremely scant. Nevertheless, all the evidence would point to a predominantly German origin for those who first came to Poland in appreciable numbers.

To begin with, we know that some of the first Jews in Poland started out from Bohemia. R. Jehuda Hachassid's correspondence with a Prague rabbi, as well as a few fragments of collateral information, indicate that East European Jewry was following the German pattern in its religious customs. Not only did Jehuda Hachassid, a rabbi in Germany, hand down a decision for them, but it appears that he was regarded in Eastern Europe as a final authority. The Prague rabbi closes his letter to him with these words: "Even if you will now retreat from your decision, I am afraid that they have

heard your first words and the damage has been done."

Another indication, perhaps, of the dependence of Polish upon German Jewry is the fact that the memorial book of the Jewish community of Nuremberg records the sufferings of Polish as well as German Jews during the Black Plague epidemic in the middle of the 14th century. The fact that the legal situation of Jews in Poland was regulated by Privileges formulated according to German and Bohemian precedent would likewise support the claim that Germany and Bohemia were their original homes, or those of their immediate ancestors. This seems all the more likely if King Casimir's words in approving a Privilege granted by himself—"in accordance with the request of all the Jews in the country"—is not simply a formal phrase; if, that is, *all* the Jews of Poland wanted a legal status like the one they were *all* already familiar with in Germany or Bohemia. And the title, Jewish "bishop" (*episcopus iudaeorum*), applied to a community leader or rabbi in Polish documents, resembles a usage found in Cologne and other German Jewish communities of that epoch.

In Silesia, which was still Polish at the time, twenty-two Jewish tombstones have been found dating from the 13th and 14th centuries. The names in their inscriptions, with but one exception, and the texts of the inscriptions themselves are similar to the names and formulas then current in German Jewry. Similarly, the recorded names of over two hundred Jews in Silesia in the years 1330-1360 are either of German provenance or Slavic translations of names of German provenance. Of sixty-six Jews in the Breslau of that time who are designated with their places of origin, most come from the immediate neighborhood of the city, or else from Bohemia and Germany; two come from other parts of Poland, and three from Russia.

Ampler evidence for the German back-

ground of Polish Jews has been preserved from the 15th century. Such evidence includes an old synagogue in Cracow built in the same style as the synagogues of Worms and Prague; a declaration by a Jew in Breslau, in 1435, which is written in German—with some "Jewish" changes—in Hebrew letters; some Jewish-German glosses found in Warsaw documents; and a document signed by the representatives of the Cracow Jewish community in 1485 which has texts in Hebrew, German, and Jewish-German. From the same century we have a statement by a German rabbi that "Poland, the State of Cracow," has already for a long time been considered as a place of refuge for the expelled Jews of Germany.

ALL this indicates that most of the Polish Jews in the centuries of the Jewish settlement in Poland, when they were still relatively few in number, were of German and Bohemian origin, even though a few of them may have come from Italy, Greece, or even from Kaffa (Theodosia) on the Black Sea. The situation at the beginning of Jewish settlement in Poland in the 13th and 14th centuries appears in this respect to have been no different from that of following centuries when East European Jewry had greatly increased in numbers and importance. In the beginning as later, the great majority of the Jews of Eastern Europe were of Western, or rather Central European, origin (Ashkenazim-German), and only a few came from elsewhere—Sephardim from Greece and Italy at first, and from Turkey as well as Italy in the later centuries.

Thus relatively few Jews have ever lived in Eastern Europe who could trace their ancestry back to a place other than Germany or Bohemia, and their Khazar origin has never been more than a myth. Those few Jewish individuals who did not come to Eastern Europe from Central Europe came mainly from Italy, or the Ottoman Empire. At least so the evidence shows.